

Town of Essex Annual Budget Process Begins

The process to bring an annual budget to Town Meeting in May begins many months before. The various Boards of Education and school administrations will prepare the Supervision District budget, Regional School District #4 budget and Elementary School budget. Within Town Hall, the Selectmen's budget will be prepared. The Selectmen's budget will go through several versions/levels before the proposed final budget is presented to the Town for a vote either at Town Meeting or referendum. For Fiscal Year 2012-2013 the Selectmen's budget process and proposed timeline is as follows:

Budget Level 1 – Original Request

Departments, boards and commissions and external agencies received budget request packages to facilitate their preparation of a budget request for the coming fiscal year. Included was a cover letter from the First Selectman providing general instruction and guidance for the process as well as a deadline of January 6th for submissions. A budget preparation workshop was held for those departments and commissions interested in gaining further insight and for asking questions. Emphasis has been placed on the need for comprehensive backup to justify budget levels. External agencies have been requested to provide financials as well as a discussion of needs, activities to be funded, and statistical details on services provided to the citizens of Essex.

Budget Level 2 – First Selectman's Request

The original requests are reviewed by the First Selectman for reasonableness prior to the first Board of Selectmen budget hearing. This also allows an opportunity to identify those requests which require additional backup or justification prior to being considered. The First Selectman has the authority to make those changes necessary to present a reasonable request to the Board of Selectmen for their consideration.

Budget Level 3 – Board of Selectmen Request

This year the Selectmen have requested that all departments, boards and commissions, and most external agencies personally present their budget requests. This will enable each group to more fully speak on behalf of their budget request and answer questions. The Board of Selectmen budget workshops are scheduled for the following dates:

Wednesday, January 18, 2012 at 5:00 p.m. – 7 p.m.

Wednesday, February 1, 2012 immediately following regular board meeting

Wednesday, February 15, 2012 at 5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Wednesday, March 7, 2012 immediately following regular board meeting, if necessary

These budget workshops are open to the public and residents are encouraged to attend. The public will be given the opportunity to comment at the end of each workshop. Based on these workshops, the Board of Selectmen will make any reductions and changes they judge necessary in order to put forward a reasonable amount necessary to provide the services and accomplish the purposes of the General Government.

Budget Level 4 – Board of Finance Request

At the Board of Finance Workshops, the members of the board must consider the Board of Selectmen budget request as well as the Essex Elementary Board of Education budget request. These workshops are also public meetings and residents may attend and observe the budget development. The Board of Finance budget workshops are scheduled for March 15, 2012 and March 22, 2012 at 7:00 p.m. at the Essex Town Hall. The Board of Finance recommends the General Government and Elementary School Budgets to Public Hearing which will be held on April 19, 2011. Presentations of both the General Government and the Elementary School budgets are made. This is the primary opportunity for the public to provide its opinions and comments on the proposed budgets. Based on this feedback, the Board of Finance finalizes a budget request to send to the Annual Town Meeting. The Annual Budget Town Meeting will be held May 14, 2012.

Budget Level 5 – Final Budget

The final budget integrates the General Government and the Elementary BOE budgets approved by vote at either the Town Meeting or at referendum with the Town of Essex share of the Regional School District #4 budget which is approved by Chester, Deep River and Essex at a separate referendum. Based on this approved funding level and consideration of the other Federal, State and local sources of revenue, the Board of Finance sets the mill rate for fiscal year 2012-2013. The Tax Collector uses this mill rate to prepare the tax bills annually.

The annual budget process requires substantial input and effort from many sources. The public is encouraged to share in this process by attending workshops, participating in the public hearing, and voting at the regional school budget referendum and Town budget vote.